

**Reference Desk Response No. 142:
Impact of Placement on Academic Achievement for Special Education Students**

Question:

1. What is the impact of different placement strategies on academic achievement for students with disabilities?

Report:

Following established RELNEI Reference Desk research protocol, we conducted a search for rigorous research reports as well as descriptive and policy-oriented briefs and articles in this area. The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research centers and several educational research databases. Our results include literature reviews, journal articles, and lists of resources. We also searched for appropriate organizations that may act as a resource for your concerns. We have not done an evaluation of these organizations ourselves, but offer this list to you for your information only.

Our Reference Desk Researchers have found that many studies suggest a positive relationship between inclusive classroom (placing special education students in general education) and academic achievement (see Louie, 2008; Newman, 2006; Rea, McLaughlin and Walther-Thomas, 2002 below). On the other hand, one study Reference Desk Researchers found indicates that high school students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms performed no differently in reading and math than students with disabilities who attended special education classes (see Fore, 2008 below).

Question:

1. **What is the impact of different placement strategies on academic achievement for students with disabilities?**

- 1.1. Math Education Practices for Students with Disabilities and Other Struggling Learners: Case Studies of Six Schools in two Northeast and Islands Region States.** *Louie, J., et al.; August 2008; U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands; 93 pages.*

Source: Institute of Education Sciences (IES)

(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?id=161>)

“This report describes in-depth practices at six schools that are making targeted efforts to improve math education for students with disabilities and other struggling learners.”

Five of the six schools used an inclusion model as their primary classroom placement tool for students with disabilities.

From page 4, “Fundamental to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 is the mandate to improve education results for students with disabilities by ‘having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible’ (section 682)...The Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) of more than 11,000 students with identified disabilities finds that ‘schools can influence the level and trajectory of students’ learning through decisions regarding instructional settings and activities’ (Blackorby et al. 2007, p. 9). In particular, for students with disabilities taking more academic classes in general education settings was positively correlated with higher reading and math scores.”

From page 5, "Providing access to the general education curriculum can improve student performance on math state assessments because it gives students the opportunity to learn the content that is assessed (Access Center 2008). Among the factors examined, Marzano (2003) also identifies the opportunity to learn as having the strongest relation to student achievement. Research on urban districts with high-performing students with disabilities finds that successful schools emphasized providing students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum and aligning the curriculum with the state frameworks" (University of Massachusetts Donahue 2004).

1.2. General Education Participation and Academic Performance of Students with Learning Disabilities.

Newman L., SRI International; July 2006; U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research; 8 pages.

Source: Institute of Education Sciences (IES)

(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pdf/20063001.pdf>)

From page 1, "National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) analyses reveal that the percentage of courses students with learning disabilities take in general education classrooms is related to both their academic performance and their social adjustment at school, independent of other differences between students (Blackorby et al. 2003; Marder, Wagner, and Sumi 2003). Including students with disabilities in general education classrooms has been found to be related to beneficial outcomes for both students with disabilities (Baker, Wang, and Walberg 1994; Waldron 1997) and their general education peers (Salend and Duhaney 1999; Stainback and Stainback 1996; Staub and Peck 1994). For example, inclusive practices have been found to be related to more appropriate social behavior and higher levels of achievement for students with disabilities, as well as to increased comfort with and awareness of human differences for students in the general population (Baker and Zigmond 1995; Walther-Thomas, Bryant, and Land 1996)."

1.3. Academic Achievement and Class Placement in High School: Do Students with Learning Disabilities Achieve More in one Class Placement than Another?

Fore, C., et al.; February 1, 2008; Education and Treatment of Children, Volume 31, Number 1, Pages 55-72; ERIC #: EJ789765.

Source: ERIC

Note: The full text of this article can be accessed through a free trial at Access

(http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-34078989_ITM)
"The purpose of this study was to examine classroom placement, inclusive versus non-inclusive, relative to the academic performance of students with specific learning disabilities in secondary content area classrooms. Fifty-seven high school students with learning disabilities were assessed using the Grade Level Short Form of the Multilevel Academic Survey Test (MAST). Their reading and math scores were examined relative to each student's grade level, number of general and special education classes attended, and types of placement (i.e., inclusive or non-inclusive setting). The results revealed no statistically significant evidence to indicate that students' academic achievement varied based on inclusive versus non-inclusive placement. The only statistically significant differences observed regarded participants enrolled in a general education literature class compared to those participants placed in a special education setting for literature. Implications for practice, limitations of the study, and considerations for future research are discussed."

1.4. Does Educational Placement Matter in the Performance of Students with Disabilities?

Luster, J. N., and Durrett, J.; November 2003; Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Biloxi, Mississippi); 20 pages; ERIC #: ED482518.

Source: ERIC

(http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/8f/12.pdf)

"This study explored the relationship between general education placements and performance of students with disabilities on state level assessments for grades 4 and 8 and graduation rates of students with disabilities. Analyses were for all 66 school districts in a Southern state. Results indicate there may be a relationship between the percent of students with disabilities receiving their education in general education classes and indicators of educational results. It has been asserted that the movement toward greater inclusion leads to greater positive educational results

for students with disabilities. The findings of significant correlations of greater inclusion to higher rates of high school diplomas and of eighth-grade test passage are encouraging.”

1.5. Outcomes for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive and Pullout Programs. *Rea, P. J., McLaughlin, V. L. and Walther-Thomas, C.; Winter 2002; Exceptional Children, Volume 68, Number 2, Pages 203-22; ERIC #: EJ641009.*

Source: ERIC

(http://www.teachingld.org/pdf/Article_4.pdf)

“This study investigated the relationship between placement in inclusive and pullout special education programs and academic and behavior outcomes for students with learning disabilities (LD). Demographic data such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and IQ established comparability of two groups. Qualitative and quantitative methods described two schools and their special education models, one inclusive and the other pullout. Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives, classroom accommodations, and teacher collaboration were examined to provide functional definitions. Results indicated that the two programs differed significantly. Further, students served in inclusive classrooms earned higher grades, achieved higher or comparable scores on standardized tests, committed no more behavioral infractions, and attended more days of school than students served in the pullout program.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

- **Center on Instruction: Special Education Strand**

(http://www.centeroninstruction.org/resources.cfm?category=special&subcategory=&grade_start=&grade_end=)

“The Center on Instruction offers materials and resources to build educators’ knowledge on instruction for students with disabilities, including guidance on the application of scientifically based research and, specifically Response to Intervention. The Center on Instruction supports the regional Comprehensive Centers as they serve state education leaders in the work of helping schools and districts meet the goals of No Child Left Behind-to close the achievement gap and improve teaching and learning for all students. Lists 68 resources.”

- **National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**

(www.nichcy.org)

“National information center that provides information on disabilities and disability related issues. Children and youth, birth to age 22, are the focus.”

- **National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities**

(<http://www.ndpc-sd.org/>)

“The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) was established in 2004 by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) as part of OSEP’s Technical Assistance and Dissemination (TA&D) Network, which supports the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). NDPC-SD was specifically established to assist in building states’ capacity to increase school completion rates for students with disabilities through knowledge synthesis, technical assistance, and dissemination of interventions and practices that work. NDPC-SD is located at the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N) at Clemson University.”

Resources on Placement of Special Education Students in General

- **Placement Issues.** *National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities*

Source: National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities.

(<http://www.nichcy.org/educatechildren/placement/pages/default.aspx>)

“Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) requires placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for each child, a setting that is based on the child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). “ Use the options and paths listed on the webpage to find out more about who decides placement and how they decide it; what LRE is and why it’s a foundation element in IDEA and in deciding a child’s placement; and how placement can be affected if a child with a disability violates certain codes of student content.

- **The Achievement of Students with Developmental Disabilities and Their Peers without Disabilities in Inclusive Settings: An Exploratory Study.** McDonnell, J. et al.; August 2003; *Education and Treatment of Children*, Volume 26, Number 3, Pages 224-36; ERIC # EJ678695. Source: ERIC

(http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/acad1/ToolKit/Articles/Inclusion_General/McDonnel.pdf)

“An exploratory study was conducted to evaluate the impact of inclusive educational programs on the achievement of students with developmental disabilities and their peers without disabilities. Changes in the adaptive behavior of 14 students with developmental disabilities during one school year was assessed in a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design... Results of a Wilcoxon signed Rank Test indicated that students with developmental disabilities made statistically significant gains in adaptive behavior. Results of a one-way ANOVA indicated no significant differences in the academic performance in reading/language arts and mathematics of students without disabilities enrolled in inclusive classes and those who were not. “

Key words and search strings used in the search:

Student/Educational Placement or Inclusive Classrooms/Schools AND Disabilities OR Special Education AND Academic Achievement

Search databases and websites:

Sources For Rigorous Research Reports: Regional Educational Laboratory Program (REL); What Works Clearinghouse (WWC); Doing What Works (DWW); National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); Institute for Education Sciences (IES); The Campbell Collaboration; Data Quality Campaign; IES Practice Guides.

Other Federally Funded Sites: The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center; The National High School Center; The Center on Innovation and Improvement; The Center on Instruction; National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing; National Center for Performance Incentives; National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities; Access Center for Improving Outcomes for All Students K-8; National Dropout Prevention Center/Network; National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities; Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement; National Reading First Technical Assistance Center; Small Learning Communities Centers; Special Education Technical Assistance for Charter Schools Project; Education Commission of the States; Regional Comprehensive Centers; Equity Centers; Regional Resource Centers.

Additional Data Resources: Education Development Center; WestEd; American Institutes for Research; The Education Trust; SRI International; ERIC; EBSCO Databases; Education Index Retrospective; FirstSearch (OCLC); ProQuest; Educator’s Reference Complete; <http://www.google.com>; <http://www.google.com>

REL Northeast and Islands

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